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ABSTRACT

The causal relationship among adult literacy, social evolution, and economic development has traditionally made adult literacy programs a priority in developing nations. To develop effective adult literacy programs, educational planners must consider a variety of linguistic, cultural, economic, and political needs. First of all, planners must define what it means to be literate in a particular culture or country. Frequently, planners of functional literacy programs will determine that literacy programs must be supplemented by basic educational programs emphasizing work habits, motivation, and teamwork. In other areas, adult literacy is perceived as a means to enhance civic responsibility, facilitate political and ideological changes, and enhance social as well as individual development. As more attention is given to the educational needs of adults, different types of government and private organizations are beginning to sponsor literacy programs. The roles of policy, planning, and implementation in adult education present a number of major issues that need systematic review. Included among these are the following: determination of whether it is more appropriate to conduct mass literacy campaigns or to provide basic relevant skills to selected categories and classes of adults; definition of the relationship of adult literacy programs to formal education; and delineation of the role of post-literacy programing. (MN)

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ADULT LITERACY AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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ADULT LITERACY AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Traditionally, within developing countries, adult literacy programs have received priority. It has been perceived as a fundamental activity for societal growth. No other adult education area has received such direct attention in terms of public rhetoric, resources, programs and philosophical purpose. Because its complexity and scope is identified with human progress, literacy has been frequently addressed as a separate subject for program implementation. The causal relationships between adult literacy, social evolution and economic development have raised numerous issues for which there is little empirical data available to developing countries, making it difficult to effectively implement programs. To develop effective programs, liguistic, cultural, economic and political dimensions all need to be taken into consideration.

Hunter and Harman identified five areas of concern that adult literacy programs failed to address directly:

1. The assertion that economic development, increased gross national product, and modernization automatically follow or are contingent upon literacy.

2. The parallel claim that anyone who becomes literate is automatically better off economically, is better able to find employment, and therefore becomes a better citizen.

3. The claim that literacy might somehow bring about national development in the broadest sense of the term.

4. The equating of illiteracy with inferiority, backwardness, cultural poverty and low intelligence.

5. The disregard for what individuals and groups themselves need and want within their own social settings, and the imposition of programs believed to be good for them.

The extent to which prosperous countries flourish because of their literacy level as compared to other possible contributing factors is yet an unresolved issue faced by national development planners. To what extent do advanced countries tend to design and develop large and complex literacy campaigns which to others appear to credit educational attainment rather than social and economic factors?

The notion of who is literate has always been difficult to determine, partly because statistics have not always been reliable, available or complete. From what can be ascertained, illiterates typically include those who worked in the informal or unorganized sectors of a developing country's economy. Occupationally, illiterates often are self-employed and tend to concentrate in household and family labor, such as subsistence farming. They are frequently termed "marginally self-employed." The cultural, economic, social and other disparities are so compounded that they give rise to pockets of illiteracy which often correspond to areas of poverty.

Part of the complexity of the problem of illiteracy is in defining what it means to be literate in a particular culture and country. It is a notion which varies from country to country, and even from regions within the same country. What might be considered illiteracy for one person or group of persons may be a satisfactory level of literacy for others. Adult literacy is measured by the demand society places upon its citizens. In countries with high educational levels and advanced technologies, higher levels of literacy are required. Less technologically advanced countries may not require a high level of literacy among their citizens. There are no uniformly accepted definitions of the basic characteristics of adult literacy. Coles and Sophia Scribner point out that, "although attempts to arrive at some overall measures of literacy competencies may be useful for certain comparative purposes, the conceptualization of literacy as a fixed inventory of skills which can be assessed outside of the contexts of application has little utility for educational policies."

For a developing country, adult literacy means more than just the ability of its people to write, read, and tabulate. Over the past two decades, a major emphasis has been on the functionality of literacy. In this sense, literacy is defined in relation to the demands of the society in which people must function. UNESCO defined literacy as:

> the possession by an individual of the essential knowledge and skills which enable him or her to engage in all those activities required for effective functioning in his or her group and community and who attainments in reading, writing, and arithmetic make it possible for him or her to continue to use these skills towards his or her own and the community's development. (Harvard Educational Review, Vol. 10, No. 2, p. 227, May, 1970.)

That is to say, reading, writing and computing must be ascribed functions when taught.

Persons are perceived as functionally literate when they have acquired the knowledge and skills in reading and writing which enable them to engage effectively in those activities in which literacy is normally assumed in their culture or group. Adult literacy is considered a social skill in the sense that it is used in relationships between people and between institutions and organizations. The use and application of literacy skills depends to a major extent on social circumstances and society's rate of change; it is adjusted to specific economic and social needs. Most countries need to provide themselves with a system for monitoring whether or not standards of literacy are keeping pace with the demands for literacy.

Functional literacy training is not a separate or individual educational function. Typically, training the illiterate takes place in a group context, in relation to a given environment, and with a view toward some general aspect of development. In

For most illiterate people, illiteracy is one of many interacting factors such as class, sex, dependency, unemployment, and poor housing, which result in a substandard existence. For this reason, most recent literacy campaigns in developing countries are integrated--in varying degrees-- with such social efforts as family planning, training in prevocational and vocational skills, sanitation, nutrition, child care, and civic education. Learning to read and write is perceived as an opportunity to obtain information that can be immediately used to master one's environment and thus to improve the quality of life.

For some developing countries embarking on industrialization, there is a lack of skilled workers for industrial production. Accustomed in their home villages to work to the rhythm of seasons and crops, workers find they need to adapt to machines, exactness, punctuality and the discipline of industrial production. Workers are expected to adapt to factory conditions and the notions of machine productivity.

Some functional training programs in developing countries are being supplemented by basic education programs emphasizing work habits, motivation and teamwork. Constructive work habits range from proper safety actions to continuing self-improvement. These desired habits include promptness, regularity, attention to detail, eliminating waste of materials and time, searching

for ways to improve performance, and problem solving on the job. Some planners further maintain that productive workers are those who engage in attempts to improve their whole character and personality as well as job performance.

In addition to work habits, there are at least four types of influences that affect motivation and thus impact functional literacy training. These include personal ambition, relations with others, life curcumstances, and pay and benefits. There is little that has been specifically done in fostering personal ambition. Most administrators of adult literacy programs recognize that an important factor is an instructor with the ability to inspire adults to learn. Relations with fellow villagers or workers are also critically important in motivation. Although life circumstances have an overwhelming affect on motivation, they are a force which training can address but cannot alter to any great extent. The roles of support and benefits extended to adults participating in training programs are important in creating and maintaining individual motivation. Government support for materials and stipends for attendance are frequently used as motivation. Opportunities for constructive teamwork among villages are provided by including them in the processes of planning, implementing and evaluating their own progress.

Habits of striving for excellence and high standards, of avoiding waste, and of helping others are matters of character. Attitudes toward these areas can be improved by training that is based on values transmitted through literacy instruction.

The 1965 World Conference of Ministers of Evaluation on the Eradication of Illiteracy supported the notion of functional literacy. "The very process of learning to read and write should be made an opportunity for acquiring information that can immediately be used to improve living standards . . . to train for work, increased productivity, a greater participation in civil life, and a better understanding of the surrounding world." (UNESCO, World Conference of Ministers of Education on the Eradication of Illiteracy, Final Report, 1965.)

WHY ADULT LITERACY?

Adult literacy is perceived as a means to satisfy various needs. One such need is civic literacy. The development in individuals, of flexibility, adaptability, broadness of interests, acceptance of change, and support for innovation is referred to as civic literacy. Literacy is a capability that enhances the development of reason and logic. It enables adults to make fuller use of their available resources and take the initiative in changing their lives. Paulo Freire, a Brazilian adult literacy advocate of the 1960's, emphasizes the notion that literacy is a means for the deprived to evaluate and comprehend

their own social context. Such evaluation leads to combating society's oppressive forces and to taking an active part in shaping a new environment for themselves. Freire's educational philosophy assumes that literate adults are able to create culture and that culture should be the starting point in the educational process leading to self-awareness, in relation to others as well as their own environment.

Freire's approach to literacy is known as a "psychosocial" method which teaches adults to read and to understand their world. The act of knowing as approached by Freire becomes the act of "conscientization," a process in which people are encouraged to make an analysis of their reality, to become more aware of the constraints of their lives, and to act in order to transform their environment. Freiran literacy campaigns, using his methods of learning and philosophy, are noted in such countires as Brazil and Chile.

Literacy is perceived as a means for political and ideological change. The civic view of literacy finds in the literate an important factor in assisting the political and development processes. The Cuban government, for example, has indicated that the politicization of the Cuban worker is the major reason for its literacy campaign. Civic literacy is a means by which the poor and deprived develop an awareness that they deserve more

and that they can influence their own future. Isolation from this awareness developed through literacy may cause even broader social injustices and more disruptive social unrest.

Adult literacy, advocated as a human right, embodies the values of social equality, solidarity, freedom, and active participation in community decision making. Since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the right to education and literacy is seen as a process of acquiring new dimensions as a means for liberation and self development. By remaining a victim of ignorance, adults are limited in their contribution to productive work and the benefits of the society to which they belong. A declaration adopted at an International Symposium for Literacy sponsored by Unesco in Iran (September 1975) expanded on literacy as a right:

> literacy created the conditions for the acquisition of a critical consciousness of the contradictions of society in which man lives and of its aims: it also stimulates initiative and his participation in the creation of projects capable of acting upon the world, of transforming it and of defining the aims of an authentic human development. It should open the way to a mastery of techniques and human relations. Literacy is not an end in itself. It is a fundamental human right. (Unesco The Organization's Literacy Programme: Conclusions and Recommendations of the Director-General to the Executive Board and to the General Conference on Ways and Means of Implementing 19C/Resolution 1.192, Paris, 1978, p. 5)

Adults who can exercise greater control over their lives are more capable. Adult literacy helps people to develop their

abilities, broaden their views, and both become critically aware of and share realities. Literacy can produce self-confidence and engender a feeling of self-worth so that individuals are more aware of their own potential for individual and collective action.

Enhancing development is another major function of adult literacy. On a large scale, the more highly developed abilities of a literate population make up the potential of a more highly developed nation. On a smaller scale, literacy helps develop the economic potential of individuals, expecially in the more deprived segments of society. This type of development can be described as expanding adult capabilities to produce and obtain goods and services. The majority of adult literacy literature and activities is linked to concepts of national development which employ literacy as the means for fostering an improved economic life style. The lack of acceptable literacy in a population is often noted as a major obstacle to economic development programs. Although research has not substantiated a link between literacy and economic enhancement of the more deprived segments of a society, it is often cited as a primary objective of program implementation.

Adult literacy is valuable in that it facilitates practical knowledge of such things as sanitation and the causes of infection

and disease, knowledge which can lead to an environment more conducive to productivity. Thus, many planners favor a literacy-before-development approach. However, other planners argue that the first priority is the improvement of income opportunities. This development-before-literacy approach emphasizes the need to alter and improve the work environment and opportunities before there is a need or demand for literacy skills. Subsistence farming or home piece production are minimally affected by the acquisition of literacy, as are many other types of work. If adults cannot act upon the knowledge and skills acquired, there is little immediate need for crop information or improved business practices. Most of the adult population does not have the social standing or the savings to obtain a commercial loan or to take financial risks. Accordingly, literacy is not a tool for initiating change, but is a result of economic improvements that have occurred and as such is a result based on needs. Most countries do not have and have not sought to develop a hierarchically organized job structure that corresponds to various stages of literacy achievement.

The acquisition of literacy skills is a major program commitment for developing countries. Each country has a different approach but common factors are the development of functional literacy skills in conjunction with agricultural and health care techniques and the development of civic awareness

among the poor. Such countries as Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia, are going beyond this and are focusing on creative thinking programs as a component of adult literacy. Islamic countries tend to emphasize religious teaching. Community development programs are another area in which adult literacy plays a significant role.

In some developing countries where there is a planned economy, adult literacy is approached and linked with development plans. This can be seen in China, India, and Bangladesh. In countries with high standards of living and possessing mixed political and economic systems such as Australia, United States, and Japan, the use of adult literacy as a means to national development is less direct and becomes more difficult to target. Thus, except in the more industrialized and technically advanced countries, adult literacy is perceived as having a direct link and importance to development. In countries with market economies, it is difficult to identify the place and role of adult literacy in social and economic development, but in more planned economies its purpose and needs are distinctive in organizational structure, policies and programs.

Developing countries differ significantly with regard to the organization, coordination and implementation of adult literacy policies and plans. At one end of the spectrum are those countries with market economies where central planning is not

strong. At the other end are countries where the government plays a key role in national planning with adult literacy as an integral part of education as a means for development. In this latter group of countries, promoting adult literacy is perceived as a direct responsibility of the national and local governments. Originally, only ministries of education dealt with educational concerns, but as more attention is given to the educational needs of adults other governmental ministries are becoming involved. Several governmental agencies may sponsor literacy programs:

1. An adult literacy program for members of the armed services may be conducted by the Ministry of Defense.

2. The Department of Labor may provide reading and writing skill instruction.

3. A Department of Religious Affairs may provide literacy training for priests or clerics and use available space in such places as temples for instruction.

4. The development of literacy materials may be written for ethnic groups directed by a Ministry of Agriculture.

5. The Ministry of the Interior may provide literacy training through community development.

6. The Department of Health may use literacy training to prompt health education.

7. The Penitentiary Department may sponsor literacy instruction in rehabilitation programs.

Literacy is seen as something affecting all sectors of national life. Agriculture, industry, trade, health and the social services are all increasingly engaged in collective action which favors basic instruction and literacy.

In a large number of developing countries, literacy promotion is entrusted to special departments, departments which may be independent, have individual status, and possess their own resources for program delivery. Egypt and Papera New Guinea are examples of countries with semi-autonomous agencies for literacy promotion. In many instances, provincial or regional authorities, local authorities, and village governments are directly involved and share responsibility for planning and implementing literacy programs.

Non-governmental and private organizations promoting literacy have a long history of involvement that frequently began before countries achieved independence and newly-formed governments took action. The early non-traditional literacy programs were associated with missionary activities in which emphasis was given to teaching catechism through literacy instruction. It was important for converts to read religious literature. By its very nature, the literacy work of religious organizations

frequently transcended national geographic boundaries and governmental policies. Christian and non-Christian organizations have continued this tradition of missionary work by providing for exposure to religious beliefs through reading. Today, many protestant missions in developing countries follow the strategy of combining literacy with propagation of the faith.

A number of religious and religiously-sponsored organizations have been active in literacy work. The World Alliance of Young Men's Christian Associations, the Roman Catholic Church and its affiliates, Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts and numerous other organizations have sponsored community programs and adult literacy training.

Trade unions, private companies, women's organizations and youth associations have sponsored literacy improvement programs. In some instances, these organizations were international in nature and in others they were the result of the influence of colonial powers. International women's assocations such as Associated Country Women of the World and the International Alliance of Women have been established to support local literacy programs for women.

MAJOR ADULT LITERACY ISSUES

Unlike many other areas of adult education, adult literacy tends to be more an activist-oriented field than one characterized by on-going research and specific research findings. The need for more research-based findings for program effectiveness is acknowledged by most international adult literacy advocates. The roles of policy, planning, and implementation in adult literacy present a number of major issues that need systematic review.

One such issue that has been a source of concern to both literacy planners and theorists is whether to conduct mass literacy campaigns or to provide basic relevant skills to selected categories and classes of adults such as women, farmers, and out-of-school youth. Influencing factors have to do with effectiveness, equality of opportunity and political expediency. Numerous examples exist where countries are imbued with a revolutionary spirit which initiated massive campaigns. This has been noted in Democratic Yemen, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam. Almost all newly independent developing countries opted for mass literacy efforts especially during the 1950's and 1960's. On the other hand, it has been argued that although total elimination of illiteracy is a noteworthy goal, it is impossible given limited

resources and competing priorities. With very few exceptions, developing countries can only approach literacy training for adults in stages. Further, selective adult literacy programs typically were designed by organizations and agencies that need literate people to foster the objectives of their own programs. Voluntary agencies, religious institutions, private employers or public social sectors spearhead such selective efforts. The approach taken to literacy development will depend on a country's social, economic, historical, and cultural characteristics.

A second issue is the relationships and interconnections of adult literacy programs with formal education. The implementation and program quality of universal primary education is linked to the need for adult literacy programs. Early school drop-outs are a critical factor in the level of future adult literacy. Many low-income countries can only provide limited unrestricted primary education in terms of educational years offered and the geographical areas served. It is a fact that primary school drop-outs frequently experience lapsed illiteracy. By improving retention and improving the quality of instruction, most countries hope that illiteracy can be minimized, if not prevented among future adults.

The notion that literacy training through adult education should be equivalent in some way to the formal educational

structure with appropriate certificates and diplomas is an issue among policy planners. Studies show the diversity of adult literacy programs in terms of their purposes, target groups, coverage, institutional characteristics and educational structure. Typically, programs are not designed to parallel or to provide alternatives to a national system of education.

The school certificate or diploma frequently is a major goal for adults and provisions for awarding equivalencies is a need expressed by many illiterate adults. This is not only for prestige, but is a prerequisite for promotions and employment. Furthermore, many government planners realize that literacy training is a first chance for those who were unable to obtain formal education earlier. Schools which complete education for adults in Thailand are providing literacy training and issuing certificates of completion similar to those issued to formal school graduates. The national literacy effort is directed at providing an equivalency to grade 4 of primary school for both rural and urban illiterates. Such programs, however, are patterned after the formal school curriculum and are difficult to implement among those sections of the population that are the most deprived.

The role of post-literacy programming and the need to disseminate up-to-date information are also issues of concern

for many developing countries. Some countries are making an effort to initiate regional and local libraries, village newspaper reading centers, and educational radio and television programs. In most instances, attempts are made to provide materials and programs that meet the reading levels and interest needs of targeted groups. One example is special literacy newspapers written for such groups as rural villages. In some instances, the conditions for reading centers are that villagers build and maintain it and that the federal department provide the newspapers, magazines, books, radios and televisions. The intent of post-literacy is to help people acquire knowledge and skills useful in improving their daily lives. The need for and effectiveness of post-literacy programming is an issue still to be adequately assessed and one in which limited data is available.

For those developing countries with diverse ethnic populations each with their own language, customs, and traditions, the development of adult literacy programs is especially difficult and raises numerous issues. In particular, those countries which are attempting to develop an official national language are faced with the problem of teaching literacy skills through a variety of indigenous languages, a process which could alter customs and tradition. This is a particularly sensitive issue

because the choice of a language influences the cultural identity, the economic power, and the learning competence of the people affected. In multilingual countries, the group that speaks the official language wields the political power and therefore has better access to economic power. Further, the issue of whether or not a country should be multi-lingual and seek nationalism through other means is an important consideration even among developed countries. The state of Sabah in Malaysia, with over 30 ethnic groups with different native dialects including Chinese dialects, is focusing adult literacy programs on a national language of Bohasa Malaysia. Afghanistan and Guinea both have 8 indigenous languages, India has 21 distinct languages with more than 100 dialects, Nigeria has 395 separate languages. Most of these languages are used locally or are understood by isolated, indigenous cultural groups. A planning concern is the amount of time it will take for such a campaign to be successful in terms of fulfilling national development needs.

CONCLUSION

Adult literacy is seen in many different ways. It is considered a fundamental human right, a basic human need, an instrument for social and economic development, and a means

to politicization. For most developing countries, adult literacy has been perceived as a solution to social and economic problems. In the past, national planners have claimed adult literacy as a necessity without consideration of the larger social structure. It has not been typically viewed as an enabling function rather than a casual factor. Studies have suggested that poverty is more responsible for low levels of adult literacy than illiteracy is responsible for poverty.

A number of approaches have been proposed to improve the levels of adult literacy. First, efforts have been made to improve the impact of primary education through school expansion and educational program reforms. Second, adult educators have emphasized the need to improve teaching methods and program delivery on adult literacy levels. Third, the concept of life-long learning, according to some educational planners, has the potential to respond to the needs of all ages and all segments of the population. Perceived as a concept which is a part of the educational system, life-long learning has been associated with an attitudinal need to encourage adults to participate in more structured learning. The fourth and last approach suggested is that only a major rethinking of the purposes and patterns of education, and thus literacy as a function of a larger social system, can achieve any significant change. Adult literacy has

mirrored the social and economic conditions of society as a whole and is dependent on society's goals for its direction. These approaches to fulfilling the needs of adults with minimum levels of educational attainment and language capabilities may not be mutually exclusive, but may be more a reflection of different emphasis.

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